

Abingdon Community Council

Minutes

August 27, 2012

Present:

- Council Members: Cynthia Hergenbahn (chairperson), Carlin Cook, and Earl Grey
- All chairs plus 10 standing community members
- About 75 members of the public attended the meeting.
- Guests included: Jesse Bane (Harford County Sheriff), Dion Guthrie (Harford County Council), Pete Gutwald (Director of Planning and Zoning Harford County), Andrew Tess (representing Billy Boniface, County Council President), Aaron Tomarchio (Chief of Staff Harford County).

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 pm by chairperson, Cynthia Hergenbahn.

Sheriff's representative: Captain Chris Swain (Harford County Sheriff's Department) reported:

- There is a serious burglary problem throughout the county. Section 30, this area, is doing pretty well at this point, compare to the rest of the county. Most common causes are people not locking doors and neighbors not reporting observations. Keep doors locked, valuables out of sight.
- Campaign to reduce accidents/traffic fatalities. Running radar all over the place. Targeting enforcement to identified problem areas.

Abingdon Community Council Wal-Mart Position: See attached document

Harford County Government Representatives:

Aaron Tomarchio, County Executive's Chief of Staff and Pete Gutwald, Director of Harford

County's Planning & Zoning, Department:

- Walmart is entitled by law to locate business on the Plumtree site.
- Property is properly zoned.
- Next steps:
 - Development Advisory Committee (reviewing the plan in accordance with the county codes – there is an opportunity for public input at that time), Preliminary Plan (traffic study) and Site Plan (building, layout, parking lot).
 - Record Plat stag (bonding, conservation requirements)
 - Building and Access permits
- This is at least a 2 year process.
- To date: submitted community input plan, submitted forced end delineation, scoping meeting, have not submitted any traffic studies.
- Have not received the information from the community input meeting for public record. It is due this Friday, August 31.
- Walmart has indicated that the current store does not meet their needs. Want more the Fallston model. Feel they cannot construct the store they want on the current site. County has asked them to take another look and offered to work with our planning/zoning department.

Questions/Comments from the community:

- School bus safety issues. County will view review the traffic pattern, flows, and conditions during the DAC process.
- Walmart property one of 5 large lots. Walmart traffic is one thing, what about the other lots? For preliminary plan approval, they must take all of the lots into consideration.
- Is there realistically any way to stop them? If so, where? If they can meet all of the requirements, there is no way to stop it. It would need to be re-zoned, to go through a comprehensive zoning process. There are 2 things the community would need to do, both requiring legislative action by the county council 1. Rezone property. 2. Redefine uses assigned to existing zones. Best case scenario, community needs to tell Walmart what they want. What does the community want it to look like? What does the community

want Walmart to do for the community? Even if the zoning changes could be met, Walmart will have already submitted plans and thus most likely be grandfathered in.

- We appreciate that you are listening. At July 19th meeting, Walmart did not seem to be prepared. They did not answer questions, specifically about the traffic study. They did it during school time. Do they need to submit a traffic study showing a broader range of times, etc? There is a specific outline for how a traffic study must be done and what things need to be submitted. Retail must include – morning and evening peak times and Saturday peak time counts. Did they have to stay in the Abingdon area? This is the area they want to be based on their market study.
- What can we do to get something out of Walmart since we can't necessarily fight it (see Community Council statement)? For example, get mature trees as a buffer, not stick trees.
- County Council is asking that the Community Council be allowed to meet directly with Walmart.
- Traffic study will be evaluated by county zoning (highway capacity) and state highway. They use very specific guidelines to evaluate.
- Communities all around the country are being successful fighting Walmart. We need to fight harder. There are mitigating requirements to address other conditions/regulations (environmental, etc.).
- County Councilman, Dion Guthrie stated that when he asked what's wrong with the existing site? They want to build a store in Abingdon similar to the one in Fallston, and then close the existing store. They do not want the down time it would involve to reconstruct the existing store.
- The roads will have to be improved. Walmart needs to address the roads in a defined area.
- Why have these meetings if there is nothing we can do? The laws would need to change to stop the development. What is happening today is the result of planning from years ago. We are in the development envelope as designated in the Master Plan 10 – 15 years ago. The Abingdon Community Council discussed the Master Plan a year ago and no one came to those meetings. We need to work today towards changing the future, but to do that, we need to be involved.
- Disfunction is disfunction. Walmart in that area is disfunction.
- Jason Davidson, representing Delegate Glen Glass, stated that Delegate Glass opposes this move and wants the current location expanded. When asking why, they gave him

generalities at this point. They said they would take a look at it. It is hard to fit the square footage model they want in the current location.

- Have any of the grocery stores spoken out? Kleins Shoprite has expressed concerns.
- Does traffic impact on the back roads come into consideration? There are distribution flows that are studied. There is specific criteria which is required and methodology which is evaluated.
- Educate your neighbors. Disseminate the information you hear at the meetings.
- Last year, Kohls backed traffic up during the holidays. Is that something that is considered?
- Community input meeting for Walmart, but there are other areas on the site. Traffic study must account for other available properties.
- Evergreen Business Trust – who are the principals?
- When it went to B3 zoning it did not guarantee a huge store. Why can't we bring something we don't already have? It went to that zoning because they hoped to have higher end retail, but it has not come to pass.
- Crime should be addressed in addition to traffic. What will make them listen to what we want? We can learn community concerns. When they did Fallston store, they did take community concerns into consideration.
- It is not impossible, it's just very difficult to make the change. If we really don't want it, it can be done. DAT meeting is an opportunity for the community to come with their own experts and dispute findings. What if "experts" disagree? The attorneys become involved.
- Is there a date for comprehensive rezoning? Next one in 2017. But the County Executive and/or the County Council can request one at any time.
- Stop lights seemed to be their answer. Are there requirements on how many can be in a certain area? There are cuing issues which are considered. More lights will result in gridlock. Is the County Exec the highest we can go? Yes, on land use. There are also regulatory requirements at the state levels as well. Can we get some sort of organization to boycott and picket the existing Walmart now? The County Executive has been getting feedback from the online petition. He wants to get back to the individuals so more information is needed on the petition.
- Email questions, concerns, comments to the Abingdon County Council –

abingdoncc@gmail.com

- The traffic study has not been submitted, they have up to a year to submit. Traffic counts can only be a year old.
- If Walmart misses the Friday deadline for providing the community input meeting information, they will need to do another community meeting.
- Is there a proposal to build a roundabout at Walgreens? No
- They present their study, how does the community make sure to get their concerns seen? If concerns are presented to the Abingdon Community Council, the Council will pass the concerns along.
- People are concerned with traffic cutting through Bright Oaks. The HOA should contact Christy Joyce, Harford County's Department of Public Works, to do a traffic study.
- DAT meetings are always scheduled on Wednesday morning. That cannot change. It is prescribed by law.
- Could the traffic study be posted online? It is very large but will look into it.

Updates:

- County Executive Office: Patty Gonzalez – not present
- County Council Updates:
 - Joe Woods – no representation
 - Dion Guthrie – Boycott the store and picket construction. If you support it, it will open and thrive.
 - Mary Ann Lisanti - no representation but did submit the attached: Councilwoman Lisanti 's correspondence with Walmart expressing questions and concerns.
 - Andrew Tress, representing Council President, Billy Boniface – has no specific comments but will take notes back to Mr. Boniface.
 - Jesse Bane – The Sheriff's Department not been consulted at this point. They have received concerns from the public about traffic.

Announcements:

- Next Meeting: September 24, 2012 6:30 Abingdon Branch Harford County Public Library
- Harford County Executive, David Craig, will be our guest

The meeting was adjourned by chairperson, Cynthia Hergenbahn, at 8:05 pm.

Minutes submitted by Lisa Mittman